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Naugatuck, Connecticut
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Testimony concerning Commission on Children and Children's Trust Fund

Senator Prague, Rep. Hamm, Rep. Villano and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you, subcommittee members, for allowing me this brief opportunity to address all of you.

My name is Michael Mackniak and I am the Executive Director of Guardian ad Litem Services, a non-profit 501c3 entity with headquarters in Naugatuck. Our collaborations with Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Probate Court Administration has resulted in the creation of the Guardian Model, a nationally recognized treatment modality used in enhancing community based collaboration for persons in need.

Nowhere is there a greater need for a comprehensive, collaborative approach to the delivery of effective services than to the plight of Connecticut's Children.

Unfortunately, there have been too many stigmatizing events surrounding DCF which shroud it, however incorrectly, in a cloud of mistrust and/or apprehension. Most families who would benefit from the comprehensive services offered through DCF would go to any length possible to avoid that agency. I sat in this building and personally witnessed the testimony of countless individuals who spelled out in painstaking detail their concerns with, and terrifying ordeals involving DCF. While I have had extensive experience as a practicing attorney with the administration of DCF, I am not here to belabor the points made that day. DCF is a vast entity which struggles to fulfill their mandates every day. We often fail to comprehend the tremendous number of children and families they assist and we are quick to deride them for their shortcomings.

Our lawmakers have created and have supported the creation of several agencies to afford children and families options to obtain services outside of or, perhaps, in collaboration with, DCF. These agencies include but are certainly not limited to the Commission on Children and the Connecticut's Children's Trust.

Agencies such as those under review by this panel give individuals valuable options and alternatives in obtaining much needed services for themselves and their children.

These agencies are able to take a step back and look at the politics and policies, the macro and micro economics of issues facing families in these troubled times.

These agencies offer SOLUTIONS to problems which are innovative and, in most cases save state dollars by seeking alternative funding sources. They often use these dollars to outsource to private entities which provide more efficient and more effective services to those in our communities.

These entities are, by their very creation, watchdogs which keep an eye on the needs of our communities and seek to enact laws, programs and policies to address the shortcomings of our most well-intentioned state and private entities. Without such entities, the system becomes stagnant and rests upon its own laurels, never striving to do more or to do better.

One of the hidden blessings in desperate economic times such as ours is that it affords us the opportunity to be introspective. We need to look at our everyday practices and decide which of them truly works or at least has the best chance of offering the most return on our investment dollar. This introspection allows us to avoid "business as usual" and to place our faith in services that think "outside of the box" forever moving forward and not simply treading water.

Agencies such as the Commission on Children and Connecticut's Children's Trust are specifically designed and have a proven track record of bringing programs and services to countless individuals who otherwise would not or could not receive them.

Thank You again for accepting my testimony today.